

Signed by Tim Hartzell and Debra Sonderman on March 26, 2001

Memorandum

To: Director, Bureau of Land Management (BLM)
Director, National Park Service (NPS)
Director, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS)
Deputy Commissioner for Indian Affairs (BIA)

Thru: Director, Acquisition and Property Management

From: Director, Office of Wildland Fire Coordination

Subject: Implementation of the Department of the Interior Rural Fire Assistance Program

Congress recognizes that safe and effective protection in the urban wildland interface demands close coordination between local, State, Tribal, Federal firefighting resources. Therefore, in the FY2001 Interior Appropriations Act, PL 106-291, Congress authorized establishment of and appropriated \$10 million dollars for Rural Fire Assistance to the Department of the Interior in a pilot effort to enhance firefighter safety and wildland fire protection capabilities of rural fire districts. Through this pilot assistance effort the Department of the Interior may conduct training, equipment purchases, and prevention activities on a cost-shared basis with rural fire districts. In turn, the rural fire districts will provide vital fire support that benefits resources on Federal lands.

This memorandum refines and affirms policy developed by the National Fire Plan Rural Fire Assistance working group. The attached administrative plan developed by the working group standardizes the maximum allowable cost-share per year, cost-share percentages and eligibility and evaluation criteria within the Department of the Interior. The National Fire Plan Contracts/Assistance Agreements working group developed model cooperative agreements entitled *Agreements with State, Local and Tribal Governments* and *Agreements with Institutions of Higher Education, Hospitals and Other Non-profit Organizations* to award assistance to rural fire districts.

To ensure consistency within existing rural fire assistance programs, Interior bureaus must work with the State Foresters to ensure that funding is allocated in the amount of the award to qualified and suitable rural fire districts. Awards are to be distributed to rural and volunteer fire departments directly, except in those instances where state law requires that funds be provided to the State Foresters. Report language accompanying the 2001 Appropriations Act recognizes that safe and effective protection in the urban-wildland interface demands close coordination between local, state, Tribal and Federal firefighting resources. Your representatives are strongly encouraged to include local, state, and Tribal officials in evaluating proposals and developing priorities in the selection of competitive grants.

Before you can enter into cooperative agreements and disburse assistance funds to any rural or volunteer fire department, both parties must agree on the roles and responsibilities of each party to the agreement. It is imperative to engage a contracting officer or a person with the equivalent delegated authority in the process from initiation to award.

Agency wildland fire and contracting representatives will meet with the requesting Rural Fire Department (RFD) or Volunteer Fire Department (VFD) to assist them with preparing the Application for Federal Assistance. Agency representatives will submit the completed application package to the Agency Regional/State Fire Management Officer or designated Geographic Area Coordination Center (GACC) lead. At this level, the Bureaus will process all applications and make award selections in coordination with the State Forester. Responsibility for fund transfer to each recipient is with agency personnel delegated the authority for contracting and disbursement. The direct transfer of funds to the selected RFD or VFD will be completed by cooperative agreement either through reimbursement for the recipients' expenditures or, if necessary, an advancement of funds.

Each agency must record the performance results of the RFD/VFD award system because Congress and OMB require us to report back on these accomplishments. Agencies must provide specific program implementation guidance to their Field Units in accordance with this memorandum. The Office of Wildland Fire Coordination (OWFC) will institute monthly progress reports and data calls in April 2001 through the end of Fiscal Year 2001. Completed monthly reports will be submitted in the attached format to your agency at the National Interagency Fire Center (NIFC) where they will be compiled and submitted to OWFC. You must ensure that the data entered into the government-wide Federal Assistance Award Data System is the same as is manually reported.

The Rural Fire Assistance administrative plan, interagency reporting format, and model assistance agreements are located at <http://www.blm.gov/natacq/FIRE/contracting.html>. Direct any technical questions of a national scope about the pilot rural fire assistance program to Rod Bloms, Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS), National Interagency Fire Center, 208-387-5599, and direct any agency specific questions to your internal rural assistance agreement specialists as noted in your agency specific guidance. Please direct general policy questions and comments to me at 202-606-3211.

Attachment: reporting format
Administrative plan
2 model assistance agreements

cc w/ 2 attachments: Department of the Interior Fire Directors
National Interagency Fire Center

***Department of the Interior
Rural Fire Assistance Program
Administrative Plan***

Purpose

The Rural Fire Assistance program is designed to increase firefighter safety and enhance the fire protection capabilities of rural fire departments. These goals will be achieved by assisting those departments in meeting or exceeding accepted standards of wildland fire qualifications, training and performance. Emphasis is placed on departments that protect rural communities, play a substantial cooperative role in the protection of federal lands, and are associated with Department of the Interior managed lands.

For FY2001 the Bureaus targeted implementation by March 1st. The Contracts/Assistance Agreements Working Group developed model agreements to provide assistance to Rural Fire Departments. The Rural Fire Assistance Working Group will reconvene prior to FY2002 to develop a comprehensive administration plan contingent upon selection of a different funding alternative for future years.

For FY2001, a “test pilot year”, the following criteria will be used to determine suitable Rural Fire Assistance projects.

Program Administration

1. Eligibility Criteria

Statewide agreement with the State Forester who maintains cooperative fire agreements with the RFDs/VFDs or a cooperative fire agreement with an Interior Bureau.

Rural fire department serving a community of a population of 10,000 or less in the wildland/urban interface.

Funding request is limited to training, equipment, and prevention activities.

The rural fire department must have the capability to meet cost share at a minimum of 10 % (which may include in-kind services).

2. Evaluation Criteria - For use of designated evaluator to rank eligible Rural Fire Departments for fund allocation.

Determine each department’s frequency of responses to wildland/urban fire incidents in local area. Evaluate these frequencies against other applicants.

Evaluate the department’s wildland prevention and education program needs relative to the other applicants.

Evaluate the department’s training program needs relative to the other applicants.

Evaluate the communities and DOI’s values to be protected relative to other applicants.

Evaluate the percentage of wildland/urban lands relative to the other applicants.

Determine the number of wildland fire engines in the department relative to the percentage of wildland/urban interface acres protected.

3. Funding

The basis for funding distribution to the respective Bureaus will be the percentage of cooperative wildland fire agreements with communities under 10,000.

To ensure consistency and compatibility with existing rural fire assistance programs Interior Bureaus will work with the State Foresters to coordinate funding of RFDs/VFDs to ensure funding is allocated to appropriate departments.

4. Monitoring

Utilize the National Fire Plan web site as the clearing house for assistance to Rural and Volunteer Fire Departments. The web site contains information on what department is being assisted, type of assistance being provided and which Bureau is providing the assistance.

5. Performance Report

The following reporting elements are considered critical to evaluate program results. These include: Region, State, Congressional District, DOI Unit, Name of Rural Fire Department, Request Amount, Allocation \$ Amount, Rural Fire Department Use: training, equipment, prevention, Rural Fire Department Cost Share In-Kind/Amount, and DOI \$ Amount Expended. The Rural Fire Assistance reporting format is attached.

6. Administrative Conditions

The primary use of funds will be those identified in the appropriation language.

A maximum allowable contribution from Department of the Interior per Rural Fire Department per year be established at \$20,000.

The basis of cost share should not exceed 90/10 percent, with smaller percentage being co operator responsibility. Co operators' contribution may be in the form of in-kind service.

